OPINION

BY NOMAN AHMED

Planning proposals

LAST month, officials and a team of consultants, assigned to prepare the Greater Karachi Region Plan 2047, made a presentation and invited comments and recommendations from stakeholders, including Karachi denizens — indeed, a positive move. Based on various studies and observations of city affairs, nine main points, fundamental to urban planning, emerge.

One, Karachi needs a permanent consultative forum, which in addition to local government (LG) and federal and provincial institutions, is represented by professionals and concerned citizens with experience and knowledge of urban planning and management.

Its mandate should include the challenges of urban living and governance, the appraisal and review of development projects and addressing citizens' complaints regarding civic affairs. With city governance dominated by several authorities and organisations, the forum can deliberate issues and discuss solutions. It can be given legal powers, equivalent to those of a city ombudsman, to enforce decisions.

Two, Karachi needs a broad-based rehabilitation plan to upgrade and fix roads, drains, parks, local-level public spaces, etc. Ordinary citizens across rich and poor neighbourhoods can work towards changing their immediate environs. Such rehabilitation must evolve a process where residents' priorities are addressed first.

Three, the city needs a policy for supplying land to house the urban poor. Extremely high land rates, legally dubious land options in the informal sector, missing facilitation options for credit to acquire land, and limited availability of rental housing make housing a pipe dream for the majority of Karachi's denizens. Knowledge-based intervention with input from low-income housing experts can fix matters.

Four, upgradation of notified *katchi abadis* must be undertaken immediately. Deprived of such upgradation for years, millions of residents of settlements such as Orangi, Qasba and Baldia continue to live in sub-human conditions. Lessons can be drawn from the past. Operationalising the survey of *katchi abadis*, revising urban housing density standards, initiating the delivery of lease documents and recovering applicable charges are some steps that are needed. There are many citizen-led pilot projects which offer ready-to-use recipes for such reforms in our informal settlements. A common plan that consists of civic input will help address the perennial issues that plague squatter settlements by enabling the latter to graduate to the level of ordinary city neighbourhoods.

Five, the plan must create a mechanism for organising and updating city-level records for land, infrastructure, development projects and utilities. Across society, land is viewed as a precious resource. Policymakers generally view land as a commodity which can be traded to obtain short-term financial gains. From a city planning and sociological perspective, this is not right. Land is a finite asset, which can only be used for public benefit. Its utilisation is best determined through a professionally sound and socially appropriate planning process. There can be no healthy urban life without a proper utilisation policy for land and a land-use plan that details all proposed functions, keeping in mind constraints and potential. Given the crisis of infrastructural decay, poor governance and declining urban management capacities, any new venture must be examined for its operational viability and sustainability in both the short and long term.

Six, the city needs taxation reforms with regard to levy, collection and spending control on taxes. It is true that property tax is a source of urban finance. But Karachi must be able to actually benefit from revenue derived from its territory and a range of enterprises. Activating the provincial finance commission is key to making this happen.

> Nine points are fundamental to urban planning.

Seven, the capacity building of an elected LG is a prerequisite for enabling this vital tier to contribute to urban development and management. From training councillors and union council chairmen to the provision of essential administrative staff and facilities, it is a comprehensive area of action.

Eight, a public audit and appraisal is necessary for projects initiated with donor support. We always hear of billions of dollars being spent on certain infrastructure projects and 'reform' initiatives, but see very little of the benefits trickling down to the people. Water supply, sanitation and public transport are key areas where this massive 'investment' has been purportedly made, without much result.

And lastly, a legal and institutional arrangement must be evolved to make the new plan a binding framework for all to follow. Otherwise, its fate will be no different from earlier attempts. ■

The writer is an academic and researcher based in Karachi.

BY NASEER MEMON

Learning from floods

THE floods have receded after unleashing their virulence in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), KP, and Punjab. The disaster has not only left behind a trail of tragedy but also a repository of knowledge and experience to learn from. For those living on riverbanks, floods are not a surprising phenomenon. In fact, they have respected the timing, the course and geography determined by rivers over the centuries. The recent floods offered several lessons for us and our decision-makers.

After an initial ramble about cross-border water weaponisation, rationality prevailed. In fact, floods of biblical proportions have ravaged both sides of the fence. Indian Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Indian-occupied Jammu & Kashmir received above-normal rains in the pre-monsoon months of June and July. Water levels in the Bhakra, Pong and Ranjit Sagar dams were high in July — an ominous sign made worse by the communication breakdown between Pakistan and India due to the latter's unilateral suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty. Pakistan must be extra vigilant in monitoring monsoon developments in the catchment areas of the shared rivers to help it take anticipatory measures.

The loss of life was alarmingly high in GB and KP this year. A number of deaths could have been averted through diligent administrative measures. Tourists' dismissal of weather advisories resulted in several deaths. Access to disaster-prone areas should be restricted in ominous weather conditions.

Riverbed encroachments caused entrapment and deflection of flood flows. The Ravi and Sutlej were erroneously treated as dead rivers. Numerous structures were constructed on the Ravi riverbed. Bunds built illegally by *zamindars* on the Chenab and Sutlej riverbeds are proliferating. Impediments in rain drains caused urban flooding in Sialkot, Gujranwala, Karachi and Islamabad. Poor regulation by the municipal authorities and the absence of land-use planning have resulted in the increasing spread of obstructive structures. More than 200,000 people were displaced in Sindh's riverine areas even when the flood was flowing within the limits of the banks. The menace of floodplain encroachments should be eradicated through strict legal enforcement to avoid calamities. Satellite mapping of all natural waterways could be carried out with the support of Suparco to mark encroachments. A five- to 10-year plan to remove existing structures, along with a stringent moratorium on new ones, is long overdue. Similarly, Suparco can identify deforested areas causing gushing flows in the mountains. Subsequent reforestation can improve watershed management.

Public infrastructure is mostly designed without considering climate change parameters. Several urban colonies are built in low-lying areas. Roads without adequate drainage structures have created new choking points. Irrigation and drainage channels are excavated across natural flow paths meant for evacuating rainwater. With a burgeoning population, the density of public and private infrastructure has multiplied amid minimal regulation. Provincial planning and development departments do not scrutinise schemes by applying climate change filters. Consequently, public sector development projects are implemented without examining their vulnerability or multiplier effect caused by capricious climatic behaviour.

Breaches on the M-5 motorway need critical analysis. Breaches in the Noraja Bhutta embankment on the Sutlej left a large population in Multan, Bahawalpur and Lodhran marooned for several days. The National Highway Authority had to clog culverts and bridges by packing heavy stones, turning the motorway into a temporary dam. The alignment and adequacy of cross-drainage works need to be examined and, if necessary, redesigned to avoid a recurrence of such episodes.

> We build on floodplains, then call it misfortune.

River bridges provide vital links to several districts; however, the narrow spans of these bridges are causing backflow and spillage. Faulty bridge designs also encumber the velocity of floodwaters and exert stress on embankments. According to a report published in this newspaper, "the Baba Farid bridge on the Sutlej river, connecting Pakpattan to Minchinabad, lacks culverts along an eight-kilometre stretch of its approach road. As a result, the river's decades-old natural waterways, which allow excess water to pass during floods, have been blocked".

In Karachi, the Malir river swelled overnight and several areas dominated by encroachments were inundated. A section of the newly built Shahrah-i-Bhutto was washed away as the structure was located on the floodplain of the river.

Lessons from the floods demand deeper introspection and corrective measures. Our current development paradigm is flawed and needs urgent reform. ■

The writer is a civil society professional.
nmemon2004@yahoo.com

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

2nd BD putsch

NEW DELHI: A faction of the Bangladesh Army staged a putsch today [Nov 3] but left Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmed in office as President, Western diplomats in India said.... The diplomats, quoting reports from their missions in ... Dacca, said the Army leadership, in a second major military takeover in three months had seized power from the Junior Officers who brought President Mushtaq Ahmed to power.... The leaders of the August coup — seven Army Majors and one colonel — who killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and more than 20 members of his family and close political aides, had been killed..... Diplomatic sources quoted unconfirmed reports from Dacca as saying that Gen Khalid Musharaf, Chief of the General Staff, was the new strongman in Bangladesh. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, as reported from Peking,] China ... said Indian troops intruded into its territory in Tibet and opened fire on Chinese personnel last month. A Chinese Foreign Ministry statement ... also said four Indian soldiers were killed by Chinese civilian checkpost personnel who were obliged to fire back in self-defence on Oct 20. The statement ... rejected the Indian claim that Chinese ambushed an Indian patrol "well within Indian territory".

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

Dalai Lama flees Capital

NEW DELHI: The Dalai Lama, 16-year-old boy ruler of Tibet, has fled from Lhasa as an estimated 21,000 Chinese Communist invaders drove to within 50 miles of the capital city, reports from the Northern Bharat border said on Friday [Nov 3]. It is reported that the boy ruler made the decision to flee the capital after four of his Cabinet Ministers were killed while fighting with the tiny Tibetan army to hold back the Communists.

The main body of the Chinese troops was reported less than 150 miles from Lhasa with the big advance patrols as close as 50 miles. Reports from the border city of Kalimpong said that Dalai Lama's flight had shaken the morale in the Tibetan army.

Meanwhile, informed sources said the Bharati Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is being pressed by his top level advisers to refer the invasion of Tibet to the [UN]. The sources said Pandit Nehru had opposed taking the matter to the Security Council but he is now being urged to do so because of the "insulting, provocative, abrupt and arrogant" Chinese Note charging Bharat with meddling in something that was not its business. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@dawn.com

Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Trade imperatives had the last laugh

THIS is with reference to the report 'Trump trims China tariffs after talks with Xi' (Oct 31). The meeting between United States President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping led to a landmark trade agreement that has the potential to reshape the global balance of economic power.

In effect, what had begun as another episode in Trump's favourite America First campaign ended as a stunning reversal of Washington's long-held trade strategy. For the first time in decades, the US found itself negotiating not from a position of dominance, but parity — perhaps even vulnerability — with an economic rival that refused to bow to pressure.

The meeting in Busan produced an agreement that went far beyond tariff adjustments. It marked a recalibration of two superpowers' economic engagement, with provisions covering tariff reductions, rare earth exports, fentanyl-precursor chemicals, and agricultural trade. The outcome reflected necessity as much as diplomacy.

A US Geological Survey report had cautioned that rebuilding a domestic supply chain could take up to 10 years and cost more than $80 billion. Faced with that reality, Trump's negotiators entered Busan with fewer cards than before, and Beijing knew it. Yet rather than triumphalism, China played its hand with deliberate restraint, focusing on pragmatism over posturing.

Xi also announced the resumption of large-scale Chinese purchases of American soybeans and other farm products. For Trump, the Chinese commitment provided domestic political relief, while for Xi,
it reaffirmed China's leverage as the indispensable buyer in a fragile global food chain.

The meeting's choreography reflected contrasting political cultures, but a mutual understanding of necessity. Trump's exuberant declaration that the talks were "12 out of 10" was classic self-promotion, but analysts quickly noted the absence of concrete enforcement mechanisms. It was a deal built on goodwill and fatigue rather than trust.

Taiwan and semiconductor restrictions — particularly on the Nvidia Blackwell chip — were consciously excluded from discussion, a recognition that overloading the agenda could derail even fragile progress. The leaders instead opted for a narrow corridor of cooperation, deferring confrontation to another day. Trump got his headlines and leverage, while Xi went home satisfied that he had prevented the US from dictating fixed terms that could constrain China's long-term strategy.

The deeper significance of the summit lay in what it revealed about the world's economic transition. The age of laissez-faire globalisation is fading. What emerged in Busan was the architecture of a managed economy — a hybrid system in which trade is weaponised yet indispensable, competitive yet cooperative.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO), once the arbiter of free trade, now stands eclipsed by the pragmatism of direct, leader-to-leader diplomacy. Today, every commodity — from semiconductors to soybeans — has become a bargaining chip in a global chess game where economic interdependence is replacing ideology.

The agreement has not ended the US-China rivalry, but it has transformed its character. It turned open confrontation into managed coexistence, and replaced threats with transactions. The world may still be divided by politics, but it is bound by necessity. And in that necessity lies the triumph of diplomacy over dominance.

Qamar Bashir
Islamabad

Ghost emails

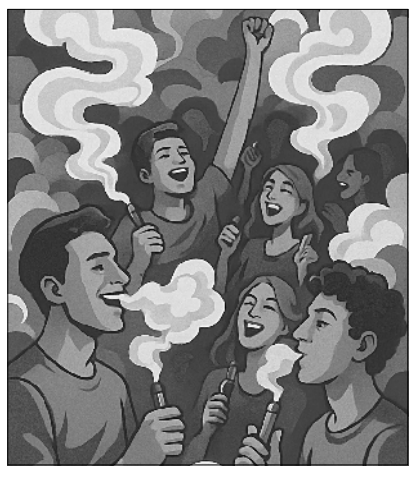
ON March 13 this year, I applied for the renewal of my British passport through a private agency in Karachi. On March 24, the United Kingdom (UK) Passport Office confirmed having received the case. However, the frustrating ordeal started only after I received an email three weeks later from the same office, asking me to 'sign and return the application' that was being dispatched to my address.

Unfortunately, my wait for a response to my sent documents turned into weeks. Making matter worse was the fact that I continued to receive the same automated email asking me to 'sign and return the documents'. I made multiple attempts to reach out the passport officials in the UK to lodge my complaint and to clarify my position, but could not.

Eventually, two emails came my way: the first warning me to either close my case or forfeit the fee in case of non-compliance, and the second informing me about the arrival of my renewed British passport in Karachi. The latter brought much relief to me, but soon I found that it was a 'fake' email and there was nothing to be found once I reached the relevant office.

It was only after getting an appointment at the passport office in London that I received my renewed British passport on Aug 26, just a day before its expiration date. The whole frustrating episode raises some serious questions that no official is willing to answer. Why did an automated email keep landing in my mailbox without any document attached? Why did my response to emails continue to fall on deaf ears? Who will refund the extra cost incurred on traveling to London for having the passport renewed? Who should I hold accountable for the trauma I suffered just because of someone's negligence?

Parveen Shah
Karachi



Toxic silence

ACROSS Pakistan, we are witnessing an unregulated epidemic. E-cigarettes, initially marketed as a 'smoking cessation tool' for adults, have quietly evolved into a youth addiction trap. These devices are discreet, odourless and alarmingly easy to conceal. Flavours, like 'blue raspberry ice' and 'peach blast' are not designed with chain-smoking adults in mind; rather they are tailored for first-time teenage users. The packaging is flashy. The branding is playful. The threat is real.

E-cigarettes contain a seriously potent mix of nicotine salts, ultrafine particles, and toxic compounds, such as formaldehyde and acrolein. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned that these aerosols can irreversibly damage adolescent lung tissues, and impair brain development. In the United States, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has described teen vaping as an 'epidemic', with well over two million students using e-cigarettes in 2023 alone.

In Pakistan, national statistics remain scarce. Yet, the presence of the problem is undeniable. Walk through any college campus or secondary school, and the scent of artificially flavoured vapour is hard to miss. Physicians have reported increasing cases of vape-related lung injury. Teachers admit that school washrooms have become common hiding spots for vaping. Parents, doctors and educators regularly share concerns about how widespread the issue has become.

To address this growing crisis, Pakistan must broaden its tobacco control framework to explicitly regulate e-cigarettes. This includes banning youth-targeted flavours, standardising plain packaging, implementing strict age-verification for purchases, and launching nationwide educational campaigns. A robust legal and policy response rooted in both public health and due enforcement is essential to prevent long-term damage.

Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have taken preliminary steps by introducing restrictions on flavoured e-liquids and sales near schools. However, without a comprehensive federal policy, these measures have remained fragmented. Online retailers continue to exploit regulatory gaps, while underage consumers adapt quickly to every workaround.

If left unchecked, e-cigarettes could suck a whole generation into the trap of addiction. Legal action must not come after irreversible harm has been done. This moment calls for clarity, coordination, and the political will to prioritise public health over commercial convenience. The vapour may be sweet, but the silence around it is dangerously toxic. It is time for Pakistan to act and protect its youth before the next crisis settles in their lungs.

Abdullah Lashari
Karachi

Gwadar water issues

THE water issue in Gwadar has two facets — water availability and water storage. The problems have persisted for at least the last 30 years. I once worked as a consultant to the Public Health Engineering Department in 1998, and have a working knowledge of the issues involved.

One of the projects I remember was about the rehabilitation of a 134km ductile iron pipeline from Akra Kaur dam to Gwadar town and a branch to Jiwani via Pishokan. It involved general rehabilitation of the system, including protection against corrosion. The system was functional till 2008.

The dam is fully silted up and de-silting is immediately required. It is proposed that the dam be de-silted, solar pumps with 'stored' hydropower or batteries be installed, and the pipeline be re-examined. The type of pipe used should be ductile iron that has a life exceeding 100 years.

There is no reason why this key project cannot take off, becasue the whole area is relatively easy to secure against terrorism.

Iqbal Mirza Nazar
Karachi

▶ **SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES:** Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of our economy. However, they face numerous challenges, including limited access to funding, intense competition, and regulatory hurdles. To overcome these challenges, the government and financial institutions must provide more support to SMEs through initiatives, such as low-interest loans, tax incentives, and training programmes. Additionally, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation can help create a favourable business environment. By supporting local businesses, we can stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and preserve our cultural heritage.
Amna Tariq
Rawalpindi

▶ **COMBATTING TERRORISM:** Terrorism is one of the biggest problems the world faces today. It not only affects safety, but also halts a society's progress. The need for improving security systems cannot be overstated. Police, army and intelligence agencies must work together to dismantle these networks, protect our borders, and stop illegal weapons trade. Many young people are tricked into joining terrorist groups because they are poor, uneducated or jobless. If the government provides them good education, jobs and hope, they will choose peace over violence. People must be vigilant and report if they see anything suspicious. Together, we can stop terrorism by being alert and responsible citizens.
Saleh Alijan
Karachi

▶ **BROKEN ROAD:** About three months ago, Balochistan government had built a road in Sakran, from Abdullah Goth to Walidad Goth. The recent rains have destroyed it completely. The road was built for large vehicles, but now even motorcyclists are afraid to use the road. The infrastructure across Balochistan has been badly damaged by the rains, but no real effort has been made to take things back to at least the pre-monsoon level of functionality. The government needs to take concrete and effective steps

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
Email: dawnombudsman@gmail.com